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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 PARIS 000846

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SUBJECT: DEPUTY SECRETARY'S MEETINGS WITH SENIOR GOF
OFFICIALS ON SUDAN, CHAD, AND COTE D'IVOIRE

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Classified By: Ambassador Craig R. Stapleton. Reasons 1.4b,d

¶1. (C) Summary: The Deputy Secretary met separately on February 3 with Presidential Counselor for African Affairs Michel de Bonnecorse and Chief of Defense General Henri Bentegeat for exchanges on Sudan and Chad. French interlocutors concurred AMIS should transition into a UN mission, while emphasizing an Abuja peace settlement was indispensable to UN engagement. Bonnecorse and Bentegeat said the Darfur crisis had left Chad's President Deby isolated and vulnerable. France recognizes Deby's failings but warns that Deby has no successor and his demise or departure could lead to civil war. Bentegeat said France had emergency evacuation plans for the international community. He stressed that French troops would not fight in support of Deby. Bonnecorse said France had engaged to encourage an AU-chaired 8 February meeting in Tripoli between Deby and Bashir which could result in a border-monitoring agreement involving some role for French forces. Bentegeat said France was already engaged in aerial monitoring. Bonnecorse asked about the possibility of postponing elections in Chad on the condition that Deby step down from power within one or two years. He suggested Chad may break relations with Taipei, with implications for PRC positions on Darfur. On Cote d'Ivoire, Bonnecorse feared the onset of civil war. Concerted international pressure -- sanctions and a robust UNOCI -- were needed to force the "fascist" Gbagbo to hold elections. Bentegeat appealed for UNMIL reinforcement of UNOCI. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The Deputy Secretary explained the U.S. approach on Sudan as building on the 2005 North-South Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) as the cornerstone for a broader Sudan-wide peace that would encompass Darfur and the Beja region. The Darfur crisis required efforts to ameliorate the humanitarian situation, to reinforce security through deepening AMIS capacity and readying the transition to a UN mission, and to bolster the difficult peace process in Abuja. Despite an

overall reduction in Darfur mortality rates, the situation in West Darfur continued to deteriorate with violence washing across the border with Chad and shaking up the regime of President Deby.

Presidency Views: CPA stagnating, Darfur weakening Chad

¶3. (C) Michel de Bonnecorse, Presidency Counselor for African Affairs, observed with regret that the original dynamic was gone from the CPA since the death of John Garang.

Salva Kir, Garang's successor, was less engaged, and the position of Vice President Taha, the SPLM's principal interlocutor, appeared to have weakened. The impact of the Darfur crisis on Chad was France's immediate concern and Bonnecorse worried about the regional implications. The effects of Darfur instability could radiate further into Central African Republic and also incite Libyan activity.

¶4. (C) Bonnecorse favored AMIS transition to a UN mission. To cover an interim AMIS funding gap of 160 million USD, he expected the EU to provide for a third of the needs, he hoped the USG would provide another third, and that other parties -- Canada and Arab states -- would cover the remainder. In terms of AMIS and UN assistance, France preferred an EU-driven solution, though a NATO logistical and planning role was admissible. Advancing the Abuja peace talks was indispensable to a UN transition, he asserted. He understood the AU summit in Khartoum seemed to have energized the negotiations. While only an observer at the Abuja talks, Bonnecorse said France would be available to help if the USG wanted.

¶5. (C) Bonnecorse asked whether Darfur parties may demand a reworking of the CPA in order to introduce a tripartite redistribution of wealth and power in lieu of the present

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North-South accord. Was the CPA at risk of unraveling? There was no serious risk in the view of the Deputy Secretary, who noted that the framework of the Abuja talks

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was closely mirroring the CPA structure of power-sharing, wealth-sharing, and security reform. The security sector was especially thorny, since there could be no peace without dismantlement of the Janjaweed.

Presidency Views: Defusing Chad-Sudan Friction

¶6. (C) France, for instance, could play an active role in addressing friction between Deby and Bashir, and Bonnecorse admitted there had been much French engagement in recent days. He informed the Deputy Secretary that Deby and Bashir had now agreed to attend an 8 February meeting in Tripoli under the auspices of AU Chairman Sassou-Nguessou, and facilitated by Qhadaffi. CAR President General Bozize and Chairperson Konare would also attend. There were hopes to reach an accord to interdict proxy assistance by either party to either Darfur rebels or breakaway Chadian military elements, Bonnecorse said. The fact that the AU would technically host, instead of Libya, was pivotal in Deby's decision to attend the meeting, according to Bonnecorse.

¶7. (C) In Tripoli Deby and Bashir would also broach monitoring of the border with Darfur. France, he suggested, could make available aerial photography. Probed by the Deputy Secretary about the French project to monitor the border, Bonnecorse underscored the surveillance would necessarily be incomplete, and would also involve Sudanese and Chadian parties. Deby would only agree to the monitoring on condition that Bashir engaged regular Sudanese troops. Bashir however wanted to use Sudanese militias.

Presidency Views: Deby at Risk, Chad could fracture

18. (C) Deby faced serious problems in Chad which Darfur had exacerbated. His position was extremely fragile and he had lost the support of at least half of the Zarghawa clan. His clash with Sudan and his sparring with the World Bank left Deby deeply isolated, and France worried that it remained his last support. Justifying French support, Bonnetcorse warned Deby's departure would leave a vacuum that could lead to violent civil war, with three to four different ethnic groups ready to divide the territory, and Qhadaffi on the margins prone to a misstep. Nonetheless, Deby would not collapse due to a military attack, Bonnetcorse thought. France meanwhile continued to advise Deby to renew dialogue with the World Bank and to go forward with the organization of fair and transparent elections in May, inviting international observers.

19. (C) Bonnetcorse asked the Deputy Secretary about a recent report that the USG may be amenable to a prolongation of Deby's presidential mandate and the postponement of the elections on the condition that Deby agree to step down within 1-2 years. The options, according to Bonnetcorse, were either to force Deby to hold fair elections this spring -- in which Deby will handily triumph, Bonnetcorse predicted --- or to support Deby for an agreed interim period. France would not object to the latter scenario, Bonnetcorse declared. The Deputy Secretary said he was unaware of any USG discussion of that nature. He said the USG was still trying to get a better sense of Deby's current viability. Bonnetcorse offered that France did not yet have much of a reading about possible successors, though a Zarghawa seemed likely. He noted that this would be a bad sign considering their increasing radicalization. Bonnetcorse's deputy, Labriolle, dismissed as Zarghawa fantasizing the rumor that Mini Minawi wants to exploit the Darfur rebellion to take power in Chad.

Presidency Views: Chad may break with Taipei

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110. (C) Continued USG and EU pressure on Khartoum was imperative, the Deputy Secretary said, especially on behalf of CPA implementation. He acknowledged French ability to contribute, particularly with Chad, and thanked Bonnetcorse for efforts in support of the February 8 Tripoli meeting and the potential agreement on border monitoring. Chad, Libya and Eritrea all exercised influence on Darfur rebels. He suggested France and the USG could work together on Libya and noted that the PRC has some leverage with Eritrea. Bonnetcorse commented, without elaborating, that Chad may look into the option of breaking its relationship with Taiwan. (Comment: The unstated implication was that the decision could alter PRC positions on Darfur.)

Presidency Views: Cote d'Ivoire and Civil War

111. (C) Bonnetcorse stated France believed Cote d'Ivoire was on the brink of civil war. Divisions were profound and hatred ran deep between extremists in the camps of Gbagbo and the Force Nouvelles. It was a miracle, he said, that civil war had been averted, thanks in large part to the strong engagement of the UN and the AU. Presidential elections appeared the only viable exit strategy and the only hope for reconciliation. However, the international community -- the AU, the Security Council, and the P-5 -- would have to deepen its engagement in order to meet the 31 October target. Sanctions, coupled with a more robust UNOCI, were the chief counter to slippage on the election calendar. Otherwise, Cote d'Ivoire would degenerate further and become like Liberia in the 90's. Bonnetcorse branded Gbagbo a fascist, who commanded only a minority of the population and would lose in elections. Gbagbo, like all fascists, employed street agitators, armed thugs, and targeted propaganda. The

international community must never give the impression of vacillation.

MOD: Yes on AMIS Transition, but a Hard Chore

¶12. (C) Concurring with the Deputy Secretary's analysis, General Bentegeat, Chief of Defense, declared that France shared the USG view on the need for AMIS transition into a UN mission, noting the continuing financing challenges for AMIS, whose budget will run out end March. The Deputy Secretary observed that the USG budgetary processes, like those of the EU, were geared toward UN peacekeeping. General Bentegeat observed that AMIS had patent weaknesses, namely in terms of intelligence, logistical planning, and transportation; the chain of command was especially poor. Perhaps a NATO role would be effective but to only a limited degree, he suggested, adding that AMIS also needed technical advisers "in the right places" to establish order.

¶13. (C) The General judged the transition to a UN mission would be challenging. The General averred, speaking from personal experience, that UN peacekeepers, when operating in the absence of a peace accord and without a clearly defined mission, were "absolutely ineffective." Hence, achieving success at the Abuja talks should be the top priority. Given notional projections of a 20,000-large force for Darfur, the General added that the UN would also be hard put to find adequate peacekeepers to deploy, even if current AMIS troops took part. Sudanese President Bashir's rejection of non-African peacekeepers was a further complicating factor, he observed. The Deputy Secretary said he had urged Sudanese VP Taha to look at a UN deployment as less problematic for Khartoum than a continued worsening of the Darfur crisis and consequent international opprobrium. There could also be benefits, he suggested, from joint-integrated units comprised of government, SPLA and potentially SLA troops operating under UN oversight. Such units would have better chances to

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reintegrate Darfur rebels than standard Sudanese military. At the same time, their deployment would enable the government somewhat to reestablish sovereignty over Darfur.

MOD: Chad at Risk

¶14. (C) General Bentegeat said France provided some assistance to refugee camps in Chad and through support for NGOs. He called the French military role minor, apart from helping with transportation between N'djamena and Abeche. By all reports, the humanitarian situation near the border was "very bad." French forces remained vigilant, worried at the potential for a surge in cross-border refugees that would exceed Chadian capacity. However, the chief French concern was the existence of an ongoing Chadian rebellion.

¶15. (C) The Chad-Sudanese relationship remained "conflicted and confused," the General commented. The cross-border population lacked any national identity apart from their particular ethnic group. In his measured response to the Darfur crisis, Deby, a Zarghawa, had cut himself off from his own ethnic group, and now was threatened by 2,000 armed Zarghawa rebels based in Darfur, equipped by disparate Sudanese parties. (Note: Bentegeat described Deby as a true citizen of Chad, unlike other Zarghawa; he was trained in France and spoke French, unlike his clansmen.) The Darfur risk was not the main threat however to Deby. France worried more about a possible coup in Chad, given the endemic corruption of Deby's Zarghawa entourage. France had decided to reinforce its garrison in N'djamena (now 1 battalion), who would be prepared to evacuate the approximately 3,000 foreign citizens through Cameroon in the event of upheaval.

¶16. (C) Deby had strengthened his position along the border in the last month and his troops were able to repulse any

attack to the north of Abeche, the General judged, but the southern border with the Central African Republic would be more difficult. French forces moreover were conducting aerial patrols along the Darfur border. Deby's regime was most vulnerable to a coup in N'djamena where his allies are corrupt, and there is dissatisfaction over his recent alliance with the Darfur rebels. Chadian troops were amassed alongside Darfur, and would have difficulty responding to threats to the oil fields in the south. The General did not consider Libya a major threat and noted Qhadaffi's willingness to serve as an intermediary between Deby and Bashir. Qhadaffi of course was capable of destabilizing Chad, however, Deby could easily retaliate in kind, the General asserted, calling the relationship a "balanced game." Although anti-Deby rebels were divided into four different cells, they were nonetheless capable of a "decisive victory" through a coup in N'djamena, he claimed.

¶17. (C) Deby had lived amid uncertainty for years. He could be assassinated in N'djamena at any time, General Bentegeat suggested, or he could survive through the full term of another presidential mandate. His health was also poor and the General found him to be visibly tiring toward the close of a 90 minute meeting together in January. France, he assured the Deputy Secretary, had no illusions concerning Deby. "We know his weaknesses" and Deby "is not a good President." However, France sees no other alternative to Deby in the near future. France does not support the regime, the General stressed, and French troops will not fight alongside Chadian troops. France only has a military cooperation agreement with Chad, not a defense accord.

¶18. (C) The Deputy Secretary cited SRSB Pronk's concern that instability in Chad, including the possible overthrow of Deby, could exacerbate violence in Darfur and incite attacks against refugee camps. He asked how France would react in such circumstances. General Bentegeat responded that French assets in the region were not that strong, but that France

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would react, as appropriate, in support of refugees in Chad, but he could not foresee French intervention within Sudan.

MOD: UNMIL should help UNOCI

¶19. (C) The Deputy Secretary expressed USG support for the French role in efforts to stabilize Cote d'Ivoire. Bentegeat said France wanted to be working along with the international community there, rather than on the front line. The General appealed for the USG to help by supporting temporary troop transfers from UNMIL in Liberia to UNOCI. Such support would be consistent with past USG leadership in encouraging the UN to look to regional reinforcement and management of UN missions. The French believed that great progress had been made on Liberia and the situation was certainly better than in Cote d'Ivoire.

Participants

¶20. (U) Meeting at Elysee Palace:

The Deputy Secretary
Ambassador Stapleton
Michael Matera, D Executive Assistant
Taiya Smith, D Special Assistant for Africa and European
Issues
Richard Mills, D Senior Advisor for Public Affairs
Greg D'Elia, Embassy Africa Watcher

Michel de Bonnecorse, Counselor for African Affairs
Jacques Champagne de Labriolle, Charge de Mission
Bernard Diguët, Conseiller Technique
Interpreter

Meeting at Ministry of Defense:

The Deputy Secretary
Ambassador Stapleton
EUR PDAS Kurt Volker
Michael Matera, D Executive Assistant
Taiya Smith, D Special Assistant for Africa and European
Issues
Richard Mills, D Senior Advisor for Public Affairs
Christine Davies, D Special Assistant for Economic and
Development Issues
Greg D'Elia, Embassy Africa Watcher

General Henri Bentegeat, Chief of Defense
MG Christian Falzone, Deputy Chief of Staff
Jean-Marie Magnien, Diplomatic Adviser
MG Patrick de Rousiers, Head of Euro-Atlantic Division
Col. Charles Deleris

¶21. (U) Message cleared by the Office of the Deputy
Secretary.

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¶22. (U) Minimize considered.

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